**Interview with Senator John Danforth on the Mark Reardon Show, KMOX Radio**

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**Mark Reardon**

Let’s have a conversation about everything going on in the country with Donald Trump and the aftermath of the election with one of the guys I like most in all of politics and that is former Missouri Senator John Danforth joins us this afternoon. Senator Danforth how are you?

**Senator Danforth**
I’m great, how are you?

**Mark Reardon**

I’m doing fantastic. I had a couple of days here so I’m refreshed. I think the country needs to take a deep breath after this election season. Now you’ve been out of politics for a while but you would admit that it is seemingly is one of these things, these campaigns that they go on forever, right?

**Senator Danforth**

Yeah, I mean it’s just amazing. It used to be that my campaign went on for maybe seven months and it seemed like forever but now when an election is over the next one starts.

**Mark Reardon**

Now what were your thoughts on what happened last week? Now I don’t know specifically but did you support Donald Trump going in to the election?

**Senator Danforth**

Well I’m on the Presidential Debate Commission and we had a policy against supporting candidates for president so I adhered to that policy, but in general I thought it was a very disturbing election on both sides. Some of the things that Trump said were just terribly offensive to a lot of people and the same for Clinton particularly when she called Trump supporters the basket of deplorables. So I think there’s a lot of blame to go around and even on the part of the media, as a matter of fact. So yeah, I thought it was a very, very divisive election and I’m concerned that this is going to hold over and that to an extent it has been holding over since. In articles and newspapers that people are worried about people in their families getting together and spending their time fighting and we just can’t allow that to happen. You know we have a great country and what’s made it great is that our mission has been to hold ourselves together as a very diverse country of people who don’t agree on a lot of things and have strong feelings, but the purpose of America is all of us together, *e pluribus unum,* and that’s what all of us have to work on.

**Mark Reardon**

Yeah I thought the President took a great tone in those few days after the election. I was encouraged by what he said. I said on the air last week I wish he would have taken a tone like that a little more often in his presidency, but why do you think, because look, a lot of us got it wrong. I got it wrong; I didn’t think he was going to win. I was no fan of Donald Trump and I made it clear here on the show many times, much to the disappointment of many of my listeners who were fans but what message do you think was sent by Trump’s victory? I spoke with some people even over the weekend I was deer hunting in Howard County and there were several people and I was in a group of people who had I think one hundred percent Trump supporters or at least Trump voters and some of them even admitted, look I wasn’t voting for him I was voting against Hillary Clinton.

**Senator Danforth**

I think that there are a lot of people in our country who feel hurt and more than hurt they feel threatened and I think that’s definitely true amongst Clinton supporters and also amongst Trump supporters. I think a lot of Clinton supporters were and I think all of us, a lot of people, I was, really offended by what Trump was saying about women, Muslims, and Hispanics and on the other hand, I think a lot of Trump supporters felt that they had been disrespected and that liberals had been very, very condescending towards them and putting them down and treating them as though they are sort of dumb-dumbs and also more than that, more than disrespecting them, threatening their values and particularly for religious conservatives who have a sense that they have religious values and that people on the left are trying to get them to do things that are contrary to their deepest beliefs. So there’s a lot of hurt feelings and a lot of feeling of being threatened by both sides, so what’s that mean going forward? It means that we have to try to respect one another even if we disagree with them and we have to make room for people to disagree with us and not just push, push, push relentlessly against people who just happen to differ from what we think.

**Mark Reardon**

And I think on that note there might be some opportunities, trying to look at the positives here, former Senator John Danforth is my guest, look one thing that we know is that Trump is not an ideologue right, so, you don’t actually know where he’s going to be on some of these issues but that might actually bode well for getting things done in the next four years and maybe bringing people together.

**Senator Danforth**

Well, it’s certainly possible and you know as you said, since the election some very good things have been said by people, by President Obama in various statements that he has made that have been very generous, same with Secretary Clinton and her comments making her concession speech but the same with Donald Trump, I mean what he said on election night and what he said in the oval office and what he said to Leslie Stahl on her program. All of that was very conciliatory and very generous. And I think we should try to emphasize that. It’s easy to pick people apart. I thought after the Leslie Stahl program, that was sort of done to Trump because he was saying, he was really saying to gays, you don’t have to worry, we’re not going to push that. Well that should be the news story. But the news story tended to be, well why didn’t he say the same on the abortion issue? Well just give him time, you know, but it seems to me, and I hope I’m right on this, but I don’t know, but I hope I’m right that as President Obama said, the President’s responsibilities change people and they make them realize that they have awesome responsibilities to the entire country and the number one responsibility is to hold us together as one people.

**Mark Reardon**

For a lot of voters this election was about the future of the Supreme Court and as someone who fought so passionately for your friend Clarence Thomas—which I can’t believe, I’m sure you can’t believe that was twenty-five years ago—you certainly understand the priority a lot of people had with not letting this court go to however many nominees the next president might have if it were a democrat.

**Senator Danforth**

Yeah, no I thought that was the strongest argument Trump had during the campaign. But it was very interesting to me that each of the two candidates when asked [about] the Supreme Court, they both had litmus tests and Clinton’s was quite extensive it was abortion and gay marriage and guns and campaign financing and Trump also was guns and abortion, but that should not be the issue for the Supreme Court. The issue is what’s the role of the Court: is it to interpret the law or to make public policy and I think both of them were saying, we want Justices who will make public policy, who will be super legislators. I don’t think they should have said that. I think their position should have been, which is what my position is, which is that the role of the Court should be: to interpret the law, not to create social policy.

**Mark Reardon**

What do you think the priorities will end up being as we head into the early part of next year? Look, there is an opportunity here for some really substantive change with a Republican in the white house, with Republican control of both the House and the Senate and you know I had predicted last week actually for several weeks that the political [unclear] of Speaker Ryan were a bit premature and we learned this week that that was in fact the case and it was solidified even more with Trump picking Reince Priebus as Chief of Staff. But I think Trump, to a certain extent, needs Paul Ryan, he’s the policy guy, and you’re looking at tax reform that can really happen that never would have happened if Hillary Clinton was elected.

**Senator Danforth**

Well I think, I agree. I think that there’s some real opportunity here and you know, I don’t know Donald Trump, but if he were to ask my advice (he won’t), but I would say start out with some winners, start out with the low hanging fruit, the things that can be done and can be done on a bi-partisan basis, one of them is tax reform at least to an extent. I think a lot of people, Democrats and Republicans, believe that the tax structure that now exists makes America less competitive. And then another is infrastructure and if I were the president I would add I don’t think I would have a meal at the White House without having members of Congress, Republicans, Democrats, leadership, members of the [unclear] committees, breaking bread with me and saying, look we understand the infrastructure is crumbling, what can we do about it? How can we fix this? Or, we understand that the tax code has to be changed and certainly there are going to be points of disagreement but where can we agree? So start out in areas where there is a possibility of agreement and build on that.

**Mark Reardon**

And I really think that that’s possible as well, you know with the infrastructure in particular, you’d have a lot of bi-partisan agreement potentially on moving a bill forward which would be refreshing if someone would take advice like that. And we know Donald Trump is good at negotiating, he’s told us that over the course of this campaign but there really is a chance for him to say, look we have to solve some of these problems.

**Senator Danforth**

Yep, I think he can do that. But I think the other thing is that the atmosphere has to be right and I think that’s a good sign from the last week. I think that generosity in dealing with other people and in what we say about them and maybe staying off Twitter and just accent—you know the old song—accentuate the positive. I think that’s the thing to do. And just understand that, hey, in America we disagree about a lot. In fact, we created a constitution that recognized and allowed for that disagreement and even builds on that disagreement so yeah we are going to disagree on a lot but eventually we have to try to work things out and we have to do so in a way that is not only practical, but also that recognizes and appeals to the highest values of our country.

**Mark Reardon**

Former Senator John Danforth, my guest this afternoon, we have to take a quick break but hang in there, I want to talk to you about Missouri politics, Eric Greitens, and Josh Hawley and some of the other things happening here. We’ll do it in a moment on KMOX. Former Senator John Danforth is my guest on KMOX this afternoon. Let’s shift a little bit to what happened locally. You did not take a stand on the presidential race because of your role in the debate commission, but you did support both Josh Hawley and Eric Greitens, didn’t you?

**Senator Danforth**

Yeah, I did. Well you know, I’m a Republican, I supported the Republican ticket and I thought it was a really good ticket. And I am especially high on Josh Hawley, our new Attorney General. He’s a person I’ve known since he was a law student and I think I know him pretty darn well and he’s the real deal. I mean he is really smart, he’s a very attractive person in politics, and he thinks broadly about the country and about the values of the country so I think Hawley, first off I think he’s going to be a terrific Attorney General and beyond that, he should have a very, very bright future.

**Mark Reardon**

Well you know, look, and I said this last week, he just seems like the type of guy that will be in the United States Senate. I mean that seems to be his calling and destiny, not to get too far ahead of ourselves right now but that would be my guess if I were placing chips on the table right now.

**Senator Danforth**

Well you know, what we’ve learned recently is that this is totally unpredictable, but yeah, I’ve been thinking about since the election about Josh and about one of my great friends in the Senate, Pat Moynihan, Daniel Patrick Moynihan. He was a Democratic senator from New York, and a scholar, as Josh is. And he brought the Senate a special quality, a depth of thinking, a breadth of thinking, which was just beyond the immediate and really about the country. And there is a great role for that. There are a lot of smart people in the Senate; there are a lot of smart people in politics. But the kind of person who has an understanding of history, an understanding of the Constitution, of how the country is structured, the values of the country, that’s something that is a special gift and I think he has that to offer.

**Mark Reardon**

He has been, by the way, I don’t know if you are aware, the official Constitutional law expert of the Mark Reardon Show, for like three years now. It comes with no compensation, but it’s a hell of a title.

**Senator Danforth**

You’ve done a good job of recruiting then.

**Mark Reardon**

Well and, you know, seriously so I recognized early on when I had a chance to know him a little bit that he was everything that you just said he is, and that he is really smart, so I was happy to see him win that election. You know I was at, you know I considered Tom a friend of mine, Tom Schweich, I know that he was very close with you. I was at the funeral that day. Your eulogy was amazing—we played it back on my show that afternoon. I think a lot of us were numb in the aftermath of what happened last year. But you know the question, well I guess almost two years ago now, the question was, was what you said that day, were there lessons learned? Because if you think about this cycle, the political ads seem nastier than ever. It was, you know, if you go back to the primary for Governor, I thought there were some things in that particular race that were rather disgusting. So I wonder if you have an opinion on whether or not people heard what you were saying that day.

**Senator Danforth**

Well, I mean, I was, I’m disappointed, you know. I mean, I didn’t say what I said just to hear the sound of my own voice. I really, I really wanted to elicit a public response against the over-the-top meanness in politics and particularly, any whiff of anti-Semitism. And I think that, you know, politics does reflect the American people. It is, it comes from us, not from on high, not from the politicians. The politicians respond to what we say, they really do. They’re very attentive to public opinion. So what’s the public opinion? And I think that it’s so negative, it’s so vicious because they think, “Well this works. It gets out the vote, it appeals to the base and so on.” But my point in that Schweich sermon at his funeral was, “well let’s say it doesn’t work.” You know, let’s say that we, that we are not going to put up with this personal destruction that politics has become and we’re certainly not going to put up with any form of bigotry. And just stop it! And I don’t know that that message has been heard yet and I think we, I think we have the opposite in parts of this past campaign. And, um, so now where do we, I mean really the question isn’t, “What’s happened in the past?” It’s “Where do we go from here?”

**Mark Reardon**

Right, right.

**Senator Danforth**

What’s the public have to say, so let’s see.

**Mark Reardon**

Well and, you know, I’m guessing, I might be wrong about this, I’m guessing John Danforth is not a guy who’s on Facebook. Is that accurate?

**Senator Danforth**

That is absolutely true. I’m nobody’s friend and nobody’s mine. I’ve never looked at the Facebook to tell you the truth.

**Mark Reardon**

Well you’re better off for that, but the reason I bring it up is because, and I don’t do, I have this policy because I got into trouble many years ago, like six years ago, I do not do politics on Facebook. I do it on the radio; I do it on Twitter. But I mean the nastiness that you see out there on social media, and I love social media, a lot of what happens out there, but, you know, I think that it does get reflected in these political campaigns and you can’t say… I’ll give you an example, a real life example here. I’m rather fond of Senator McCaskill, I like her, I genuinely like her. We disagree on many, many issues, we happen to bleed black and gold and, you know, we’re fans of the University of Missouri so that sort of brought us together. We can have conversations; we can debate civilly as I think you used to do when you were in the United States Senate. But it seems like in this day and age, if you say something like that, if you mention that you are friends with Daniel Patrick Moynihan, for many people, that’s unacceptable, you’re selling your soul.

**Senator Danforth**

Yes. I think this is true and I, well it’s true on the edges, it’s true on the so-called base or the people who are the most active people in party politics and the people who vote in primary elections. And there is a kind of, don’t give an inch, you know, don’t compromise on anything, don’t even, don’t even befriend the people on the other side. And it just doesn’t work. I mean, it doesn’t, it not only does it create hatefulness, it doesn’t work. I mean, so people say, “Well politics doesn’t work, Congress doesn’t do anything.” That’s true, gridlock, and the nothing ever works out. Why not? Because if both sides are just making speeches at each other and just taking the hardline position for fear that they’re going to draw a primary opponent in the next election cycle-

**Mark Reardon**

Yep, that’s what happens.

**Senator Danforth**

Then they dig in and there’s nothing. But politics, honestly, is the art of compromise, that just working, working stuff out and doing so in a respectful way. And maybe you can never agree with somebody, okay. But at least you respect that person, you treat them with decency, you listen to them, and you, to the best of your ability, at least try to accommodate what their needs are. But I think that that really, that really has broken down. And in that sense there’s been a major change over the last couple of decades.

**Mark Reardon**

Former Senator John Danforth, it’s great having you back on here on my show on KMOX, and it was an awesome conversation so I really appreciate your time.

**Senator Danforth**

Good, thanks a lot.